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1. The first of the two sermons is on the subject of the

Dr. HOLE'S

TWO

SERMONS:

THE ONE

On Acts 5. 38, 39.

THE OTHER

On Matthew II. 6.

2. The second of the two sermons is on the subject of the



167

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 8. The great Duty of confessing Christ before Men, from *Mat. 10. 32.*
 9. The great Sin of denying Christ, from *Mat. 10. 33.*
 10. An inordinate Love of Money the Root of all Evil, and of Heresies in Religion, &c. from *1 Tim. 6. 9, 10.*
 11. Gamaliel's Advice in the Case of the Apostles, from *Acts 5. 38.*
 12. The Stumbling-blocks of Christianity removed, from *Mat. 11. 6.*



Gamaliel's Advice in the Case of the Apostles; shewing the Vanity of all Human Contrivances, together with the Stability of the Divine Counsels.

IN A
S E R M O N

Preach'd before the
UNIVERSITY
OF
O X F O R D,
In the Year 1720.

By MATTHEW HOLE, D. D. Rector
of Exeter-College, and Vicar of Stoke-
gursy in Somersetshire.

PROV. xix. 21.

There are many Devices in Man's Heart; nevertheless the Counsel of the Lord, that shall stand.

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Printed by JOHN DARBY in Bartholemew-Close, for A. BETTESWORTH in Pater-noster-Row, C. RIVINGTON in St. Paul's Church-Yard, H. CLEMENTS in Oxford, H. HAMMOND and J. LEAKE in Bath. 1721.

General's Advice to the Court of the Admiralty
in the Year of our Lord 1720
of the British Council.

IN A

SERMON

Preached before the

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OF



OXFORD

In the Year 1720.

By MATTHEW HOLT, D.D. Rector
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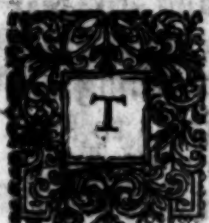
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ACTS V. 38, 39.

And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this Counsel or this Work be of Men, it will come to nought; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.



T H E S E Words are the Advice of Gamaliel, a grave and learned Doctor among the Jews, at whose feet St. Paul is said to be brought up, *Acts* 21. 3. The Advice was given in the case of the Apostles, which was briefly this:

Our blessed Saviour, after his Resurrection from the dead, and a little before his ascending into Heaven, gave a Commission to his Apostles and Disciples, to go and preach the Gospel to all Nations; and to that end endowed them with Power from on high, by shewing down the Gifts and Graces of the Holy Spirit upon them, and promising to be with them, and their Successors, to the end of the World. Accordingly the Apostles being thus authorized and furnished for the Undertaking, enter'd upon their Office, preaching Christ and the Resurrection every where, healing all manner of Diseases, and dispossessing evil Spirits; insomuch that the People brought forth their sick into the Streets, and laid them on Beds and Couches, that the Shadow of Peter and the other Apostles might come over them, and heal them.

them. By these miraculous Cures their Doctrine took in all places where they came, so that *Multitudes both of Men and Women believed, and there were daily added to the Church such as should be saved.*

The News hereof greatly alarmed and incensed the Chief Priests and Rulers among the Jews, who fearing the spreading of this Doctrine to the prejudice of their own, laid hands on the Apostles, and committed them to Prison, thinking thereby to put a stop to their farther Progress: but God sent an Angel by night to open the Prison-Doors, and commanded them to go into the Temple, and to speak there of the things pertaining to eternal Life; which they accordingly did with great and wonderful Success. The Chief Priests and Elders offended hereat, sent Officers to bring the Apostles from the Prison, and to set them before them: but the Officers finding the Prison-Doors shut, but no Prisoners within, related the same to the Chief Priests and Elders, who began to doubt within themselves, and to fear whereunto these things would grow. However hearing the Apostles were in the Temple preaching and teaching the People, they order'd the Officers to seize and bring them thence without Noise or Violence, (for they feared the People lest they should have been stoned) and set them before the Council: which being done, the Chief Priest asked them how they durst to propagate a Doctrine amongst the People, which they had forbidden them to preach; to which they boldly replied, that *they were to obey God rather than Men*, withal declaring, that *that Jesus whom they slew and hanged on a Tree, hath God raised up, and exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give Repentance and Remission of Sins, of which we are Witnesses.* When they heard these things, they were filled with rage against the Disciples, and took counsel together to put them to death.

But while they were thinking on these things, there stood up one in the Council, named *Gamaliel*, a learned Senator, and of great Reputation among the People, who, commanding the Apostles to be put forth for a little space, spake thus unto them, *Ye*

Men

Men of Israel, take heed to your selves what ye intend to do as touching these men: for before those days there rose up one Theudas, who boasted himself to be somebody, to whom a great Number of men joined themselves, but he in a little time was slain, and all as many as obey'd him were scatter'd and brought to nought. After this man rose one Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him; but he also perished, and all, as many as obey'd him, were dispersed. From which Example he thus bespeaks them in the Words of the Text, And now I say unto you, refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this Counsel or this Work be of men, it will come to nought; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, and to attempt it would be to be found Fighters against God: which case being somewhat parallel with the Designs of some bad men in our days, who seek to subvert the Doctrine of Christ, and expose to contempt the Dispensers of it, it will not be improper or unseasonable to discover the Folly and Danger of such Attempts, which the grave Senator in the Text wisely warns all men against. In the Words then we may observe,

I. A Caution against all rash and rigorous Proceedings against the Ministers of Christ, *I say unto you, refrain from these men, and let them alone.*

II. A double Reason or Argument to back and enforce it: The one taken from the Vanity of all humane Counsels and Contrivances; *for if this Counsel or this Work be of Men, it will come to nought.* The other from the Strength and Stability of the divine Counsels; *but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it.*

III. The Danger of opposing our Ways and Works to the Will of God; implied in these words, *lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.* Of these briefly.

I. I begin with the Caution against all rash and rigorous Proceedings against the Ministers of Christ: *I say unto you, refrain from these men, and let them alone,*

alone, that is, abstain from all Acts of Cruelty and Persecution towards them; for shedding of Blood calls loudly for Vengeance, and the Cry of Oppression is clamorous in the ears of Heaven; God Almighty hath a tender regard both for his Magistrates and Ministers, having given a strict charge *not to touch his Anointed, nor do his Prophets any harm*; for he that toucheth them, toucheth the Apple of his Eye, which will make God look upon him, not with a gracious, but revenging Aspect.

Moreover, Refraining from these men, and letting them alone, implies abstaining not only from all Violence and hard Usage of their Persons, but from all molesting them in their Office, and all hindring the Success of their Doctrine, by defaming and despising them; for to despise Dominions, and speak evil of Dignities, is part of the Character of those that are reserved for the Judgment of the last Day.

The Ministers of Christ are now, as the Apostles were of old, commanded to preach the glad Tidings of Salvation thro Faith in his Name; and tho the jealous Rulers among the *Jews* gave the Apostles a strait charge to the contrary, as some in our days may discourage us from doing our duty herein, yet we may and ought to take upon us the Courage of *Peter* and *John*, and boldly say unto them, *whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken to you more than God, judge ye*. We may not stifle the Message, which we have received from Christ himself, to publish his Doctrine and teach in his Name, and cannot but speak the things which we have heard and seen, being appointed Witnesses thereunto. The other Apostles and Disciples, animated by the same divine Spirit, preached the same Doctrine every where with the like Success; the Fame whereof coming to *Jerusalem*, and the Cities round about, highly incensed the Sanhedrim and fill'd them with greater Indignation, in so much that nothing would satisfy them but the Blood of the Apostles, till this blood-thirsty Rage was appeas'd by the grave Advice of this Counsellor, who willed them to refrain
from

from all Acts of Violence and Oppression, and to let them alone. To which Counsel 'tis said they all agreed, and calling in the Apostles they chastised and threaten'd them, and let them go.

When they departed from the presence of the Council, they were so far from being dismay'd at their Suffering, that they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer Shame for his Name; and instead of desisting from their Duty, they were daily in the Temple, and in every House ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ. After which, we read that by their means, the Word of God mightily grew and prevail'd. So that from this part of the wise Counsellor's Advice, we may learn two things.

1st, Not to be too hasty or severe in censuring and condemning innocent Persons, and much less in opposing and oppressing the Servants and Embassadors of Christ, who takes all the hard Usage done to them as done to himself: for he that heareth you, (saith Christ) heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me. Which may teach us not to aggravate small matters into heinous Enormities, nor to take malicious Suggestions and Surmises for capital Offences. *Si accusare sufficiat, quis erit innocens?* If accusing be enough to make Men guilty, who then can be innocent? We find our blessed Saviour himself was accused and arraigned before Pilate a Heathen Governor, and here we see the Apostles were charged with high Crimes and Misdemeanors before the Chief Priests and Elders, merely for preaching in the Name of Christ, which they aggravated into a Design of bringing Christ's Blood upon their Heads, v. 28. Yea, they traduced their best Actions, and turn'd their very Virtues into Crimes; so malignant a thing is Malice, which seldom or never means or speaks well, but commonly fastens upon Men of the greatest Worth and Merit. Our Saviour's direction is, *judge not that ye be not judged, for with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again,* Mat. 7. 12. Where he likewise cautions against the Hypocrisy of those, that can spy a Mote in a Brother's Eye, when

B

they

they cannot see a Beam in their own. Charity is so far from seeking or finding of Faults, that it covers a multitude of Sins: and Lenity rather hides than hunts for matter of Accusation. Both of them teach us to put the best Constructions we can upon others Actions, and to give all the Allowances that Mercy and Favour can admit of. *Summum jus* (we know) is *summa injuria*: to pursue any with Rigour, to strain the Law, and fish for Evidence to do an ill turn, is great injustice, and no better than legal Tyranny and Oppression; in short, 'tis what none can be willing should be done to themselves, and all wise and good Men abhor the doing of it to others. To deter all Men from it, St. James hath told us, that they shall have Judgment without Mercy, that shew no Mercy. And therefore let us imitate our Maker, who rather waits to be gracious, than watches for our Haltings: which is the Advice of the wise Counsellor in the Text, not to prosecute the Apostles, but to refrain from them, and let them alone.

2dly, We learn from hence, that Suffering is no Disparagement to a good Cause, or the Persons concerned in it, but on the contrary often gains Advantage to the one, and Honour to the other. The Apostles rather rejoiced than repined at their Sufferings for the name of Christ, and fainted not under the greatest Tribulations for his sake: yea, they gloried in the Cross, and despised the Shame, and became more than Conquerors thro Christ that loved them. Moses esteem'd the Reproach of Christ greater Riches than the Treasures of Egypt, Heb. 11. 26. And St. Paul preferred the Ignominy of the Cross before all the Triumphs of Rome: and both having respect to the Recompence of Reward, reckon'd the Sufferings of this present Life not worthy to be named or compared with the Glory that shall be revealed hereafter.

But the Reward of good mens Sufferings is not always adjourn'd or put off till the next Life; but the Care and Vigilance of divine Providence over his Church and People, is often extended to them even in this, by blessing them in their Deeds, and preserving

preserving them from the Devices of their Enemies. 'Tis said of the *Israelites*, that the more they were afflicted, the more they multiplied and grew, *Exod.* 1. 12. The Church of God hath frequently got ground by Persecutions, and encreased the more by the Endeavours used to suppress it; and therefore it will become us, rather to appear in the defence of injur'd Innocence, than to approve of or concur with the evil Arts and Methods of Faction and Oppression: Of this the wise Counsellor in the Text was not ignorant, who therefore advised the Chief Priests and Elders to abstain from all violent Proceedings against the Apostles, to refrain from those Men, and in point of Prudence and Policy to let them alone. And this will lead me to,

II. The Reasons or Arguments here urged to that Purpose.

The first whereof is taken from the Vanity of all human Counsels and Contrivances; if this Counsel or this Work be of Men, it will come to nought. Where 'twill be requisite to enquire,

First, When any Work or Counsel may be said to be of Men. And

2dly, Why that which is so, must necessarily miscarry, and come to nought.

For the *First*, By things being of Men, cannot be meant in general of all the Counsels and Actions of Men; as if all such, how well soever advised and undertaken, must prove abortive or come to nothing: for God oftentimes makes use of Men as Instruments to bring about his own Purposes, and he is wont to give Prosperity and Success to good Men in all their lawful and laudable Undertakings. But a thing is said to be of Men, when it proceeds from the Corruption and Depravedness of human Nature, and hath nothing of God in it save only the Power of doing it; when it comes from the sinful Passions, Humours, Lusts, or corrupt Designs of Mankind, 'tis then merely human, and said to be of Men.

(1.) I say, any Work or Counsel that proceeds from the evil Passions of Envy, Hatred, Malice or

Revenge, cannot come from the Spirit of God, but is solely and properly said to be of Men: such was *Cain's* Envy against his Brother *Abel*, and *Joseph's* Brethrens hatred against him; and such are all malicious and revengeful Thoughts or Actions against any, with all the evil Effects that flow from them, which prompt Men to return Evil for Evil, and sometimes Evil for Good.

(2.) What proceeds from the swelling and corrupt Humours of Ambition, Pride and Faction, may likewise be said to be of Men, who are naturally too apt to be swayed or misled by these things.

(3.) What proceeds from Avarice and worldly Interest, is one of the sinful Devices of those that seek their own and not the things of Jesus Christ, and is therefore no better than a human Device: Of this kind is the troubling and contriving against those, who they think stand in the way of their Preferment, and put a bar to their selfish Designs, labouring hard to lay aside others, to make room for themselves, and to raise a Reputation upon the Ruin of their Betters.

(4.) What proceeds from carnal and sensual Lusts, or the original Corruption of Man's Nature, is also said to be of Men, for *that which is born of Flesh is Flesh*, John 3. 6. And what is derived by natural Propagation from our first Parents, receives a Tincture from that Fountain of Impurity from which it flows.

Lastly, Whatever proceeds from the corrupt Designs and Devices of Man's Heart is merely human, and owes its rise to depraved Nature: Of this kind are the evil Counsels and Contrivances of worldly Wisdom, the Projects of subtle and crafty Politicians, which coming for the most part from a false deceitful Heart, and directed to bad Ends, are truly said to be of Men. *St. James* fetches their Original deeper, and brands worldly Wisdom or Policy with the black Characters of *Earthly, Sensual, Devilish*, coming not from above from the Father of Lights, but from beneath from the Father of Lyes and Impostures, *James* 3. 15. In short, the things that are

of

of Men, are summ'd up by the Apostle in the Works of the Flesh, *Gal. 5. 19, 20.* where are reckon'd up all sorts of Uncleanness, Idolatry, Witchcraft, Hatred, Variance, Emulations, Wrath, Strife, Seditions, Heresies; to which are added, Envyings, Murders, Drunkenness, Revellings and such like: all which coming from the Corruption of human Nature, are the Works and Devices of Mens Hearts, and not the Fruits or Effects of God's holy Spirit. Moreover, a thing is said to be of Men, when it is undertaken without, or against God: As,

1. When any Counsel or Work is entred upon, and carried on without looking up to God for his Blessing, without imploring his Aid or Assistance, and without having an eye or regard to his Glory. Such Works having nothing of God in them are merely human, or of Men. And so,

2. And chiefly, are all those things which are set about against the Will and Command of God revealed to us in his Word. Of this sort are all Projects laid against his Church, which he hath promised to protect, and all Designs level'd against his Honour and Glory, of which he is so jealous and tender, as not to suffer it to be invaded or given to any other.

Thus I have briefly shewed you, when any Counsel or Work may be said to be purely human or of Men.

But why, or how comes it to pass, that such Works or Devices commonly miscarry and come to nothing? for so the wise Man here tells us, *if this Counsel or this Work be of men, it will come to nought.*

Why! Of this two Accounts may be given.

The one from the natural tendency of the things themselves, which lead to their own overthrow or disappointment.

The other from the just Judgment of God, who is concern'd in Honour to dash and defeat such Enterprises.

1. There is a natural tendency in these human Devices, to defeat and destroy themselves; for having no sound or safe Bottom to stand upon, they must unavoidably sink and fall to the Ground, like a House
built

built upon the Sand, which for want of a firm Foundation cannot stand the shock of a Storm, but is shaken or blown down by every Tempest. Evil Counsels are commonly attended with that Weakness or want of Power, that makes them fail or miscarry of themselves. How weak is thine Heart (saith God) seeing thou doest these things? *Ezek. 16. 30.* Guilt melts the Courage of the stoutest Sinners, and fills them with Shame and Remorse; it arms their own Minds and Consciences against them, so that neither their Heads nor their Hands can perform their Enterprize. Besides, there is that inconsistency in Falshood and Hypocrisy that frequently betrays it self, and brings all its Designs to discovery and disappointment; and they that are wisest to do evil are oftentimes notably befooled in their understanding and ways. And as there is a natural tendency in evil Counsel to destroy it self, so

2. The Justice of God usually interposes, and dashes all such Devices into pieces, for he taketh the Wise in their own Craftiness, and the ways of the Wicked are carried headlong, *Job 5. 13.* He infatuates the Counsels of the subtlest Heads, and turns the Wisdom of such *Achitophels* into Folly. So the Prophet *Isaiah* observ'd of the designing Politicians of his time, saying, he frustrateth the Tokens of the Lyars, and maketh Diviners mad; he turneth the wise Men backward, and maketh their Knowledge foolish; *Isaiah 44. 25.* In a word, he blasts the Counsels of the Wicked, and smites the strongest Brains with Infatuation and Phrenzy, when they are level'd against him. Of these things we have many Instances both in sacred and profane History. We read in Scripture how God made the Hearts of the *Egyptians* melt, and their Spirits fail in the midst of them, mingling a perverse Spirit among them, that made them fall out, and fight one against another; *Isaiah 19. 1, 2, 3.* The History of our own Country informs us of some, who, having overturned all things in Church and State, were in a little time overturned themselves by the Divisions and Follies of their own Counsels. We find the Prophet

Isaiah

Isaiah thus upbraiding and threatning the rebellious *Jews*; Associate your selves, O ye People, and ye shall be broken in pieces, take counsel together, and it shall come to nought, speak the Word and it shall not stand, for God is with us, *Isaiah* 8. 9, 10. If God be with and for us, it matters not who is against us; his Presence is a sufficient guard against all the Power and Policy of our Enemies, for he sheweth Strength with his Arm, and scattereth the proud in the Imaginations of their Hearts: which is enough to convince us of the weakness and vanity of all merely human Contrivances, the first Argument of the Text, If it be of Men, it will come to nought.

The second is taken from the Firmness and Stability of the divine Counsels; If it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it. Where we must again enquire,

First, When a thing may be said to be of God? And,

Secondly, Why that which is so, hath such a Firmness and Stability in it, that it cannot be overthrown?

1. A thing may be of God two ways, either by Permission, or by Appointment and Approbation. In the first Sense, all Evils both of Sin and Punishment may be said to be of God, because he permits the one, and inflicts the other. What Evil is there in the City (saith God) and I have not done it? — *Amos* 3. 6. And out of the Mouth of the most High (saith the Church in the *Lamentations*) proceedeth not both Evil and Good? *Lam.* 3. 38. Nothing can come to pass without him, and he doth whatever pleaseth him in Heaven and Earth, the Sea, and in all deep Places. The revolt of *Jeroboam*, and the ten Tribes of *Israel* from the House of *David*, is said to be of the Lord, *1 Kings* 12. 24. And in casting *Jonah* into the Sea, 'tis said that God had done in it as it pleased him, *Jonah* 1. 14. These and the like things are of God by way of permission in the Course of his Providence, which he so overrules, as to make them subservient to his own wise Ends and Purposes.

But there are other things of God, by divine Appointment and Approbation; and these are chiefly here

here meant in this Advice of the wise man, to wit, things done in conformity to God's Will, and in obedience to his Commands; which are most properly said to be of God, by his especial Order and Institution.

And as the things that are of men were before summed up in the Apostle's Catalogue of the works of the Flesh, *Gal. 5.* which proceeding from the Corruption of Man's Nature, and having no better Prop than humane Power and Wisdom to rest upon, must necessarily fall and come to nought; so the things that be of God are reckon'd up in the same Chapter among the Fruits of the Spirit, which are these, *Love, Joy, Peace, Long-suffering, Gentleness, Goodness, Faith, Meekness, Temperance*; against these (saith the Apostle) *there is no Law*, that is, to prohibit or punish them, but there are many Laws to require and reward them: and these are so well supported by his heavenly Blessing and Aid, that no earthly Power or Policy is able to overturn them. So saith our Text, *If it be of God ye cannot overthrow it.*

Secondly, But how come the divine Counsels or Works of God to have such a firmness and stability above all human Devices?

Why; of that sundry Grounds and Reasons may be given. As,

1. The Counsels of the Lord are contriv'd by infinite Wisdom, that can see to the Bottom and End of all things; and so nothing can miscarry for want of Foresight: *his Eyes behold, and his Eyelids try the Children of Men*; and in him are hid all the Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge. The Devices of Men are often contrived by weak Heads and shallow Understandings, that cannot see afar off; they cannot discern with what slender Threads the finest Projects are woven, nor upon how slight and tender Filaments the whole Fabrick of their Policy hangs. There are a thousand Accidents which they cannot foresee nor prevent, that may dash their most promising Designs, and bring them down to the lowest pitch of Despair, when they are mounted to the top of their Confidence. But,

God

God is a God of Knowledge, and by him Actions are weigh'd, 1 Sam. 2. 3. He searches the Hearts of all men, and is privy to all their ways; and therefore none can frustrate his Counsels, or defeat their Designs: 'tis in vain to think of outwitting infinite Wisdom, with which the Counsels of the Lord being establish'd, they must stand for ever, and none can overthrow them.

2. The Counsels of the Lord are founded upon infinite Justice and Righteousness; and that gives them so firm a Foundation, that they cannot fall, but must stand fast for ever. *The Lord is righteous in all his Ways, saith the Psalmist, and holy in all his Works, Psal. 145. 17.* The Devices of Men are frequently founded on Interest and Vain-glory, on Oppression and Injustice; all which are so bad Bottoms, as can give no Strength or Stability, but like a tottering Fabrick sink and fall of themselves. He that seeks to raise his Fame or his Fortune upon the Spoils of others, hath so many watchful Eyes over him, and so many ways of defeating him, that he is generally expos'd to shame, and oftner ruins than raises himself. The Thrones of Princes are established by Righteousness, but overthrown by Iniquity.

Now the Counsels of the Lord being all done in Truth and Equity cannot fail, and nothing can weaken or undermine them; like a House built upon a Rock, they will stand firm to all Ages, and weather all the storms and waves of Wickedness. *Thou hast maintained my Right and my Cause, saith holy David, thou sittest in the Throne, and judgest righteously; thou shalt judge the world in Righteousness, and minister true Judgment unto the people, Psal. 9. 4, 8. And therefore, saith he, thy Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom, and thy Truth endureth to all Generations.*

3. The Counsel of the Lord is manag'd by infinite Goodness and Mercy, and that makes it permanent and lasting. Oppression and Injustice pervert Counsel, and frequently bring it to no effect; Designs of Cruelty commonly prove abortive, and he that conceiveth Mischief in his heart often miscarries: whereas Goodness and Truth add Strength and Stability

to Counsel, and render it of lasting Use and Benefit. *I have said, Mercy shall be set up for ever, saith David, thy Truth shalt thou stablish in the Heavens, Righteousness and Equity are the Habitation of thy Seat, Mercy and Truth shall go before thy Face, Psal. 89. 2, 15.* And what hath so good a Foundation cannot be overthrown.

Lastly, The Counsel of the Lord is back'd with infinite Power, that is able to do all things; and therefore that shall surely stand. The Devices of Men frequently fall for want of Power to support and carry them on. *They imagined a Device (saith David) that they were not able to perform, Ps. 21. 11.* Sin enfeebles the Faculties both of Body and Mind, and the Safety of God's People often lies in the Impotence of their Adversaries; but God hath all Power both in Heaven and Earth, and none can have any without or against him: He can and will perform all his good Pleasure, and nothing is able to controul or resist his Will.

Thus we see both the Vanity of all humane Devices, and how many ways they may fall and come to nought; and likewise the Stability of the Divine Counsels, and upon what firm ground they stand. And therefore,

III. To oppose our ways or works to the Will of God, is to be found Fighters against him; which none ever did, and prosper'd. This is implied in these words, *lest haply ye be found to fight against God.* The first Fighters against God that we read of were those Giants or Babel-builders, who thought by building a Tower, whose Top should reach up to Heaven, to fortify themselves against God, and to overthrow his Counsels; that nothing might restrain them from having their own Wills, and walking in their own Ways. But God disappointed their Designs by confounding their Language, and scattering the proud in the Imaginations of their Hearts, as we read, *Gen. 11. 7, 8.* And may all that would turn Zion into Babel meet with the like Confusion.

To draw then to a Conclusion, let us learn,

First,

First, From the Vanity of all humane Contrivances to beware of engaging in them, or laying too much stress upon them. For this is to oppose our selves against Heaven, to fight against God; and we are expressly told, that no weapon either of Power or Policy form'd against him ever did or can prosper, and every Tongue that riseth in Judgment against him shall be condemn'd. *Isa. 54. 17.*

Secondly, From the Stability of the Divine Counsels we may learn to trust and rely upon God's Providence, and to refer our selves unto him for the Success of all our affairs. *Commit thy way unto the Lord* (saith the Psalmist) *and put thy trust in him, and he shall bring it to pass,* *Psal. 37. 5.* We may reasonably expect a better Issue of all matters by leaving them in God's hand, than by following the Devices and Desires of our own heart; the one is a sure and safe way to Success, the other is subject to many Failings and Miscarriages. If we cast our selves and our affairs upon God, we see he hath Wisdom and Power, Justice and Goodness enough to prosper and bring them to pass: and therefore he told the People of *Israel*, that *if they would hearken to him, and walk in his Ways, he would soon put down their Enemies, and their time should endure for ever,* *Psal. 81. 14, 15.* he would stablish his Word with them, and not suffer his Truth to fail. God Almighty hath many ways of prospering and preserving his People whilst they stick to him; as by removing their Enemies by Death, by infatuating their Counsels, by frustrating their most promising Projects, and the like: inso-much that we cannot miscarry in his hands; and no one shall harm us if we are Followers of that which is good.

Thirdly, From the Stability of the Divine Counsels, we may learn the Danger and Folly of opposing our ways and works to the Will or Word of God: for tho he hath pronounc'd them blessed that walk in his Ways and delight in his Laws, and promised that whatsoever they do shall prosper; yet for the ungodly it is not so with them, for he scattereth them like Chaff from the face of the Earth, and dasheth all

their Enterprizes. He giveth them up to their own hearts Lusts, to walk in the ways of their own Counsel; and that will lead them headlong to their own destruction.

Fourthly, The Stability of the Divine Counsels may encourage us to go on chearfully in God's way, in which he hath promised to preserve and protect his People, and not to be discourag'd or driven out of it by the Threats or Attempts of any, who bend their wits or forces against it: *For the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of Temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of Judgment to be punished*, 2 Pet. 2. 9. He hath told us, that all things shall work together for good to them that love God, and walk in his Ways, and nothing shall harm them in the latter end; and therefore God commanded the Prophet to comfort his People, and to speak comfortably to Jerusalem, saying, *her Warfare was accomplished, her Iniquities pardoned, and she should receive double for all the Troubles that had befallen her*, Isa. 40. 1.

Lastly, From this Discourse we may learn to seek unto God for help in all our Necessities, and to implore his Blessing in all our affairs, who hath determined to send us succour from his holy Place; not betaking our selves to any sinful Courses for our own safety, but committing our selves unto God in well-doing: so shall we be safe under the shadow of his Wings. And since his Will and Counsel must stand for ever, we may rest assured, that in so doing we shall never fall; especially having bid us to call upon him in times of Trouble, with a Promise of hearing us, and giving us occasion to bless and praise his Name.

Which God grant for the Merits and Mediation of Jesus Christ; to whom, with the Father and Holy Ghost, three Persons and one God, be ascribed all Honour, Power, Might, Majesty, and Dominion, both now and for ever more. Amen.

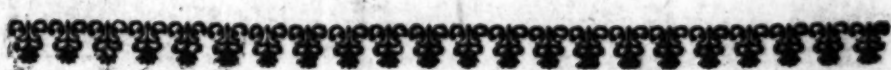

*The Stumbling-blocks of Christianity Re-
moved out of the way of Deists; or, the
Invalidity and Injustice of the Offenses taken
against Christ by antient and modern Here-
ticks.*

IN A
DISCOURSE
DELIVER'D

Before the UNIVERSITY
of *Oxford* in the Year 1720.

By MATTHEW HOLE, D.D.
Rector of *Exeter-College*, and Vicar of *Stoke-
gury* in *Somersetshire*.

Matthew XVIII. 7. *Wo unto the World because
of Offences; for it must needs be that Offences
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Printed by J. Sturges, at the Angel in St. Dunstons Church-yard, 1720.



MAT. XI. 6.

*And blessed is he whosoever shall not be
offended in me.*



TH E Occasion of these Words was from a Message of St. John the Baptist, who sent two of his Disciples with this Question to our Saviour, *Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?* ver. 2, 3. A strange Message (one would think) to proceed from St. John, who was both his Herald to proclaim him, and his Harbinger to prepare the Way before him, yea, who usher'd him into the world, with *Ecce Agnus Dei! behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the Sins of the World!* Could he then doubt of a thing wherein he was so fully and particularly instructed? or question a Truth himself, which he was commission'd to publish and declare to others? No certainly, this Question proceeded not from any Distrust or Unbelief in St. John, who both saw and bore record, that he was the Son of God, *John* 1. 34. but being then in Prison, and in danger of being put to death by *Herod*, he feared lest the Faith of his Disciples might be assaulted and shaken by his Sufferings; and therefore he thought fit to send them to our Saviour, for a more explicate Conviction and Confirmation of their Faith in him, that whatever befel him, they might continue

tinne stedfast and unshaken in the belief of him. And likewise they being to preach Christ to others, who would be very hardly persuaded to receive him, he was willing they should have the Resolution of this Question from Christ's own Mouth, that they might be supplied with Arguments sufficient for their own and others Satisfaction, and furnished with that Evidence, that their Adversaries should not be able to gainsay or resist.

To this end, our Saviour takes no notice of any doubt or diffidence in their Master that sent them, but immediately applies himself to their Satisfaction, and for a Proof of what they demanded, he appeals to his Miracles, that indubitable Seal of Heaven; bidding his Disciples to go and tell John, what things they had heard and seen, how that the Blind see, the Lame walk, the Lepers are cleansed, the Deaf hear, the Dead are raised, the Poor have the Gospel preached unto them, the Signs and Tokens foretold by the Prophets for the Demonstration of the Messiah. And then to encourage them against all the Difficulties and Opposition they might meet with in preaching him, he adds the Words of our Text, *And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.* In treating of which Words 'twill be requisite to shew,

- I. What it is to be offended in Christ.
- II. That many have been, and still are offended in him.
- III. What those Offences are, that are and have been taken against him: Together with the Weakness and Injustice of them.
- IV. What may be the Rise or Occasion of those Offences. And

Lastly, conclude with the Blessedness of those that escape them, and are not by any of those ways offended in him. Of all which briefly and particularly. And

- I. What it is to be offended in Christ. Why; that Expression signifies not barely a doubting or dislike of him, but such a one as is attended with a disbelief

disbelief and rejection of him. When St. Peter told our Saviour, that *if all Men should be offended in him, yet would he never be offended*; our Saviour replied to him, that *before the Cock crew thrice, he should deny him thrice*: Thereby intimating that to be offended in Christ is in plain Terms to deny, to forsake and fall off from him. The Greek Word *σκανδαλον* in the Original signifies a Stumbling-block, or some hard Body, against which another may so strike, as to fall and be hurt by it. The Latin Word *Offendo*, from which the English is derived, signifies to smite, or hit against some thing, that may annoy or endanger it. In this sense, is used, *Psal. 91. 12. He shall bear thee up, he offendas in lapidem, lest thou dash thy Foot against a Stone*. To defend, we know is to ward off, and prevent a Blow; and to fend off among Mariners, is to keep one Ship from grating and falling foul upon another; but to offend is to hit, dash, and strike against it. Now because this may, and sometimes does break or sink the Vessel, and Mens tripping against a hard Body is a frequent Occasion of falling; therefore whatever may be hazardous or hurtful to us, is said to offend. And consequently to be offended in Christ, is to make him an Occasion of falling, to stumble thro' unbelief, and instead of embracing to spurn at and despise him.

But is it possible, that any should thus spurn at our Blessed Saviour; and make him, who came for our Rise and Advancement, to become an Occasion of falling? Is the Rock of our Salvation made a Stone of stumbling and a Rock of offence? Yes, of this our second Particular will inform us, *viz. that*

II. That many have been and still are offended in Christ. We find it foretold by the Prophet *Isaiah*, that he should be indeed a Sanctuary to them that would believe in him, but a Stone of Stumbling and a Rock of Offence to the House of Israel, a Gin and a Snare to the Inhabitants of Jerusalem, and many should stumble and fall and be broken in pieces, *Isa. 8. 14, 15*. This Prophecy was sadly verified in the Jews and Inhabitants of Jerusalem, who were so far

from sanctifying this Lord God of Hosts in their Hearts, that they openly rejected and crucified him, and instead of making him their fear and their dread, made him only their scorn and derision. After which St. Paul tells us that *Christ crucified was a Stumbling-Block to the Jews, and to the Greeks Foolishness*; and St. Matthew, that *many were offended in him*. Yea, we find Christ himself declaring, that when the Son of Man cometh, he should scarce find Faith in the Earth. Which he soon experienced by the few that received and believed in him.

But was this peculiar to the *Jews* only? Is Infidelity confin'd to the House of *Israel*; and the contempt of our Saviour to the Inhabitants of *Jerusalem*? 'Twere well indeed, if it were so. But alas! we find St. Paul sadly complaining of some who had embraced Christianity, that they were Enemies to the Cross of Christ, *crucifying the Son of God afresh*, and by their impious Lives and Doctrines putting him to an open Shame. St. Peter tells us, that this living Stone is *disallowed indeed of Men, tho chosen of God and precious*. And is not this Corner-Stone that was laid in *Zion*, for the safety and security of the Church, by some Master-builders refused in our Days? Do not some bring in damnable Heresies, denying the Lord that bought them, and dashing against the Rock of their Salvation? And tho by the Lord's own doing he is made the Headstone in the Corner, yet too many stumble and fall at him to their own Destruction.

But here we must note, when Christ is said to be a Stone of stumbling or Rock of Offence, it must be meant only of the accidental Issue and Consequence, not the primary End and Design of his coming; for this Stone was not laid in *Zion* merely for a Stumbling-block to trip up the Heels of his Followers, but many would unhappily take an Occasion to fall by it to their own utter Ruin. Our Blessed Saviour was not born into the World to be a Gin, to entrap and endanger Mankind; for if so, it had been better for us he had never been born, and the Angels glad Tidings of great Joy at his Nativity had been rather

a black Message of Misery and Destruction. So that this can only be an accidental Event, proceeding from Mens perverseness in refusing of him, not the proper End and Effect of his Incarnation. If any be offended in Christ, and thereby hazard themselves, the Offence is only taken not given: and tho we read, that *this Child was set for the fall, as well as the rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign that should be spoken against*; yet this must not be understood of any divine Decree, that should order or necessitate it, for that would make God the Author both of their Sin and their Destruction; but only declares the unhappy Effect of some Mens obstinacy and unbelief, which would turn the most sovereign Medicine into Poison, and make that which was intended for the Good of all to become an Occasion of Evil unto many. Offences then we see may and will come. And this will lead me to enquire,

III. What those Offences are, that have been, and still are taken up against our Saviour. And they are both against his Person, and against his Doctrine.

Those against his Person are,

1st, The Manner and Meanness of his coming into the World.

2^{dly}, The Freedom and Familiarity of his Conversation in it.

3^{dly}, The ignominious and inglorious way of his going out of the World, by his most bitter Death and Passion. And

4^{thly}, The seeming impossibility of two Natures subsisting in one Person.

Those against his Doctrines are,

1st, The pretended Novelty of it.

2^{dly}, Its seeming Opposition to the Law of *Moses*.

3^{dly}, Its great Difficulty, and Opposition to Flesh and Blood; and

Lastly, its pretended Enmity and Opposition to the secular Powers. These are the principal Offences taken against the Person and Doctrine of our Saviour. But because the bare mentioning of these Offences without refusing of them, may it self prove an

Offence to many, and tend rather to shake than confirm the Faith of Christians, 'twill be requisite to look farther into them, and if it be possible to remove those Offences, at which so many have made Shipwreck of Faith and a good Conscience.

To which end I begin with the

1st Offence against Christ, taken from the manner and meanness of his Birth and Appearance in the World. His Parentage and Descent was thought too low for the Messiah: *Is not this the Carpenters Son, (say they) is not his Mother called Mary, his Brethren, James and Ioses, Simon and Judas, and his Sisters, are they not all with us?* And they were offended in him, *Mat. 13. 55.* The Place of his Conception and Nativity were too mean and bad for the Son of God, *Can any Good come out of Nazareth?* say they, and can it be thought that the Messiah should enter the World at *Bethlehem*, a poor unfrequented Village, famed for nothing but meanness and obscurity? The Time and Manner of his Entrance too were, they thought, no way agreeable to so great a Person; for can it be imagin'd, that the Messiah should be born in an Inn, and laid in a Manger, as if he came not to ransom Men but Beasts? or that the Saviour of the World should steal into it obscurely by night, having none to proclaim him but a few silly Shepherds?

His Retinue also was too vulgar, *Have any of the Rulers or Pharisees (say they) believed on him?* No, none but illiterate Fishermen and Mechanicks, who could neither discern Truth, nor detect Falshood. This was the great Stumbling-block of the Jews, who had so raised their Expectations of Greatness and Grandeur at the coming of the Messias, that they could not close with one that came clothed in all the Circumstances of Meanness and Obscurity.

Now to remove this, we need only consider these two things.

1. That Christ's coming was exactly in that way and manner in which the Messiah was promised and foretold: and

2. That

2. That the way in which he came was every way most agreeable to the end and design of his coming.

1. I say, that Christ came exactly in that way and manner, in which the Messiah was promised and foretold: And this will be evident to any, who will but compare the Prophecies of the Old Testament relating to the Messiah, with Christ's appearance in the New, where he will find that exact Harmony and Correspondence in all the Circumstances of time, place, and manner of his coming, with the Predictions of the Prophets concerning him, that may abundantly satisfy all unprejudiced Minds about them.

That the Messiah was to be of the Seed of a Woman, is evident from the first Promise of him in *Paradise*, *Gen. 3. 18.*

That he was to be born of a pure Virgin, the Prophet *Isaiah* expressly foretold, *Isaiah 7. 14.*

The very time of his coming was fixed by *Jacob*, which was at the departure of the Sceptre from the Tribe of *Judah*, *Gen. 49. 9.*

And by *Daniel*, after the expiration of seventy Weeks of Years, *Dan. 9. 26.*

The Place of his Nativity was pointed at by the Prophet *Micah*, which was not to be at *Rome* or *Jerusalem*, or any other populous City, but at *Bethlehem Ephrata*, one of the least among the Thousands of *Judah*, *Micah 5. 2.*

The manner of his entrance into *Jerusalem* was plainly foretold by the Prophet *Zechary*, in which he was not to be mounted on any stately Steed, or drawn in a Triumphant Chariot, but riding on an *Ass*, and a Colt the Foal of an *Ass*, *Zech. 9. 9, 10.* and that too not as a matter of Scorn and Offence, but an Occasion of great Joy and Rejoicing. Now how punctually these and all other Prophecies were fulfilled in the Person of Christ, the History of the New Testament will fully inform us, the Event in all its Circumstances answering the Predictions of him. So that the *Jews* expecting a pompous Messiah to descend immediately from Heaven, decked in Splendor, and attended with Magnificence, when he was promised only

only in this ordinary and obscure way, is to stumble and fall in Noon-day, and either to put out or shut their Eyes against that Light that was given for their Direction. To which we may add,

2. That the way in which Christ came was best suited to the End and Design of his coming. Had the Messias's Errand in the World been to dispose of Earthly Crowns and Scepters, and to advance his Followers to any of the Honours, Dignities and Preferments of this Life, it had been proper enough for him to have appeared in all the Pomp and Bravery, that Heaven and Earth could have set him out withal. But his Ends were of another Kind and quite different Nature; to wit, to reconcile Mankind to their Maker, from whom they had revolted; to shew them the way to Heaven, from whence he descended; *to bring Life and Immortality to light by the Gospel*; and to entitle them to the endless Glories and Happiness of another World.

Now to effect this, what could be more necessary, than to beat down the Price of this World, to expose its admired Vanities, and to bring vain Men out of that fond Esteem and Value they had set upon them? Without this he must certainly have missed his End, and defeated the Design of his coming: for who would listen to Discourses of another World, from one that seemed to affect the Riches and Gallantry of this? or learn the Lessons of Mortification and Self-denial from one that delighted in Plenty and Magnificence?

Lest therefore our Saviour should give this prejudice to the World, and by his own Example hinder the Success and Efficacy of his Doctrine, most necessary it was that he should appear without the least Ostentation of worldly Pomp and Greatness, which might inveigle the Minds of his Followers with the love of these things, and draw them from the pursuit of those invisible Joys and Glories of another Life which he came to lead them to. For this Reason it was, that this great Light of the World entered into it in such Obscurity, and passed his time in it in a State of Meanness and Poverty; for tho he
was

was able to feed thousands by Miracles when he pleased, yet himself chose to be in a condition of Want and Hunger; and tho the whole Earth was his and the Fulness thereof, yet he was content to be destitute of a Place where to lay his Head, merely to wean his Followers from the love of any worldly Greatness, and to shew that he came not to triumph in these earthly things, but to triumph over them. Which is sufficient to remove this first Offence against the Person of Christ.

The second is taken from the freedom and familiarity of his Conversation in the World. This was the Objection of the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, who often murmured against him, saying, *this Man receiveth Sinners and eateth with them*, Luke 15. 2. They frequently upbraided his Disciples with, *Why eateth your Master with Publicans and Sinners?* Mat. 9. 11. And elsewhere for his Presence at a Feast, and the Freedom of his Conversation at it, they stile him a *Glutton*, a *Winebibber*, and a *Friend of Publicans and Sinners*, Mat. 11. 9. The *Publicans* were Persons infamous to a Proverb, their Exactions and Oppressions made them odious to the People, and were therefore still coupled with Sinners. The *Pharisees* would not come near for fear of Pollution by them, and kept at a distance from them as Persons not fit for their Conversation. Now they expected the same or greater Rigours from the Messiah, and thought it inconsistent with his Holiness and Grandeur to be so familiar. And therefore to see our Saviour so freely to walk abroad and converse with those that were reputed none of the best, proved a great Offence to many. To remove which, it will be enough to consider the true End and Design of his Freedom, and that was two-fold.

1. To do good Offices both to the Souls and Bodies even of the worst of Men. And
2. To give an Example of Courtesy and Affability to all Mankind.

For the First, He went up and down indeed, but was still doing good; healing all manner of Diseases and Maladies both corporal and spiritual. This freedom

freedom of Conversation gave him the Opportunity of teaching and instructing all Mankind, and instilling many good Lessons into them, by which many were turned from Darkness into Light, and from the Power of Satan to God. The whole, saith our Saviour, have no need of the Physician, but they that are sick, meaning that his Company was most suitable where it was most wanted; and he afforded it as the Necessities of Mens Souls required it. He told the Pharisees that he came not to call the righteous, that is, such as are vainly conceited of their own Holiness, but Sinners to Repentance, such humble and modest Offenders as are sensible of their Faults and willing to amend; these being more likely to become better, than such as are lifted up with a vain Opinion of their own Sanctity, and scorn the rest of Mankind as unworthy of their Society and Conversation; adding, that *Publicans and Sinners should enter into the Kingdom of Heaven before these*. So that the main End and Design of our Saviour's eating and drinking with Publicans and Sinners was their Repentance and Salvation; he conversed with them, not to confirm them in their Sins, but to convince and convert them from the Error of their ways. He was so far from approving the Exactions of the Publicans, that he exacted Restitution and Reformation from them; and instead of countenancing and encouraging, he reprov'd and reprehended the Vices of Sinners. And this was attended with so good Effect, that by this means he won *Matthew* a Publican from the Receipt of Custom, who at his call left all and followed him; and likewise *Zacharias*, who from a Publican and Exactor, became a Convert and Teacher of Righteousness, restoring four fold to all whom he had wronged. He was feasted by *St. Matthew*, but his Presence and Discourse was the best part of the Entertainment. And he went to *Zacharias's* House, only to bring Salvation with him. In short, his whole Conversation with Sinners was merely to do good, and promote their Welfare. So that the Pharisees might as well blame the Physician of the Body for visiting Hospitals and sick Patients, as our Saviour

Saviour for visiting those that laboured under more spiritual and dangerous Distempers.

Moreover, *Secondly*, Our Saviour's freedom of Conversation was to give an Example of Humanity, Candor, and Condescension to Mankind. 'Tis no part of Religion to be sour, morose, and cynical, tho some make it a great part of their Holiness: *Nabal* for his Churlishness is styled one of the Sons of *Belial*; and to bid others stand off, come not nigh me, for I am holier than thou, is rather the Language of a proud *Pharisee*, than a good Christian. Our Blessed Saviour shewed himself marvellous free and conversable with all Mankind, and willed his Followers to go and do likewise; *Learn of me*, (saith he) *for I am meek and lowly in Heart*. There was nothing crabbed or austere in him, but in the whole Course of his Life he was affable, kind and obliging, not declining the civil Society of Publicans and Sinners; and hath thereby taught us to be humble, courteous, and kindly affectioned towards all Men. So that the Freedom of his Conversation was so far from any just Exception against him, that it affords an excellent Pattern for our Imitation.

Thirdly, Another Offence taken against our Saviour was the Bitterness of his Death and Passion; not only the Meanness of his coming into the World and living in it, but the Misery of his Death, and inglorious way of going out of it, hath proved a great prejudice to many. Crucifixion was a servile Punishment, inflicted only on Slaves and the vilest Malefactors, and was therefore attended with Ignominy and a Curse; for it is written, *Cursed is every one that hangeth on a Tree*. So that a crucified Saviour was looked upon as a gross Absurdity, taking it to be infinitely beneath the Honour and Innocence of the Messiah to be exposed to such an infamous and accursed Death. Hence we read that *Christ crucified was a Stumbling-block to the Jews, and to the Greeks Foolishness*. They could not think the Cross to be the Tree of Life, nor hope that a Crown of Thorns should ever bring them to a Crown of Glory; they reckoned it absurd to expect Life from a dying Saviour, and to look for Salvation from one who could not save himself from the Spite and Malice of his Enemies. This was the scandal of the Cross, which hath staggered the Faith of many. To remove which 'twill be requisite to consider these two things.

1. That Jesus Christ suffered only what God by the Prophets foretold the Messiah should suffer. And,

2. That his Death and Sufferings were necessary for the accomplishing the Ends for which he came.

First, I say, that Christ suffered no more, than what the Prophets foretold the Messiah should suffer. This will manifestly appear upon a Review of the Prophecies of *Isaiah*, *Daniel*, *David* and others; wherein all the Passages and Circumstances of Christ's Death and Passion are so plainly described, as if they had been acted in their Days: Yea, all the Sacrifices and Offerings under the Law were but so many Types and Shadows of this great propitiatory Sacrifice, that was to be offered under the Gospel. Now after so full and express Predictions and Declarations of the Sufferings of the Messiah, for any to be offended at a Crucified Saviour, is to stumble and fall in plain way, and to reject a Saviour, because he came in the way and manner of God's Appointment. Moreover,

Secondly, Christ's Death and Sufferings were necessary for the accomplishing of those Ends for which he came, which were chiefly these two, *viz.* To make an Atonement for Sin; and to give us an Example of a Holy Life. For both which his Death and Passion were absolutely necessary. For the

1st, Death being the Wages of Sin, he that would expiate it, must die for it; and without shedding of Blood there being no Remission, he that would remove it and reconcile us to God, whom we had offended, must shed his Blood, and lay down his Life for us. And because the Blood of Bulls and of Goats and of mere Men could not do away Sin, the Son of God was to be sacrificed, to put a sufficient Value and Virtue into the Expiation: nor could we be redeemed with such corruptible things as Silver and Gold, for it cost more to redeem a Soul; and nothing but the precious Blood of Christ, *as of a Lamb without Blemish and without Spot*, had sufficient Worth and Power to effect it.

2dly, Another Design of Christ's coming was to direct us to, and give us an Example of a Holy Life, in order to bring us to Life everlasting: and to this his Sufferings and Passion were highly useful and necessary, for by that he hath left us an admirable Pattern of Patience, Humility and Meekness, Virtues only tried in the Furnace of Affliction; his taking off the bitter Cup teaches

us

us submission to the divine Will, and Resignation of our selves under the sharpest Trials. His forgiving, praying for and blessing his greatest Enemies, have instructed us in those hard and difficult Duties. He underwent the Extremity of God's Wrath to satisfy divine Justice for our Sins, and paid our Debts to the utmost farthing, to teach us strict Justice and Honesty to one another, and bore the Agonies of Death, to take out its Sting, and arm us against the Fears of it : *Christ suffered* (saith St. Peter) *that he might leave us an Example, that we should follow his Steps, who when he was reviled, reviled not again, but committed himself to him that judges righteously.*

For which Reason we are bid to look unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our Faith, who for the Glory that was set before him endured the Cross, and despised the Shame, and is now set down at the Right Hand of God, lest ye be weary and faint in your Mind. All which considered, the Death and Sufferings of Christ are so far from being any just occasion of Offence, that 'tis a strong Confirmation of his being the true Messias, and shews that he could not have been the Person, if he had not suffered those things.

4thly, The last, tho none of the least Offences against our Saviour's Person, is the seeming impossible Subsistence of two Natures in one Person, which hath made many say in this Case, as *Nicodemus* did in another, *How can these things be?* This Offence first began with the *Jews*, who accused him of Blasphemy for saying, he was the Son of God ; when in healing the *Paralytick*, he said, *thy Sins are forgiven thee*, they rose up the Charge of Blasphemy higher upon him : and when he affirmed himself to be before, and greater than their Father *Abraham*, and that *Abraham* saw his Day and rejoiced in it, they were about to stone him, saying, *whom makest thou thy self?*

This was after followed by *Arius*, and other Hereticks who denied the Divinity of Christ, because they could not conceive how the same Person should be both God and Man, which was all one as to make him both finite and infinite, a Creator and Creature ; which, tho in different Respects, they loaded with all manner of Absurdity and Contradictions.

This old Heresy is now again revived and rubbed up by the Sectaries and Free-thinkers of our Age, to whom this Mysterious Union of the divine and human Nature in the Person of the Messias, is of late become a new Rock of Of-

fence; the Godhead of our Saviour being a Stumbling-block to the Socinians, and to the Deists Foolishness. All which scanning the deep Mysteries of Religion by their shallow Understandings, will admit nothing to be true, which they cannot comprehend by their weak Reasoning; and so they reject revealed Truths, because with *Nicodemus* they see not how these things can be. Now to remove this Stumbling-block, 'twill be requisite to consider these two things.

1st, The shortness of our Understanding even in common and natural things: And

2^{dly}, The much greater weakness of our Reason in Divine and Spiritual Matters. And then we shall see, that tho the Union of two Natures in Christ be above the discovery of human Reason; yet we have all the Reason in the World to believe it from divine Revelation. And,

1. They who object the Difficulty of understanding this Mystery, will do well to consider the shortness of their Understanding in far less matters, that lie more level to it. If we look into Nature, Art, or Providence, we shall find each of them affording Mysteries enough to baffle and confound our Reason; and many things which we daily behold and believe too, are above the reach of our shallow Understandings. Are not the wisest Philosophers puzzled about the Nature of Sounds and Colours, which are the daily and ordinary Objects of our Senses? Who can solve the Riddles of Sympathy and Antipathy? or shew why the Loadstone draws Iron, when its Influence reaches not things of a more likely and easy Attraction? Is not our Reason at a loss about the ebbing and flowing of the Sea? Or can it tell us why the Needle of the Compass so faithfully observes the *North Pole*? Is not the Naturalist's head at a nonplus about occult Qualities? and is he not forced to believe many things which he cannot comprehend? And if our Reason be thus at a stand in these natural things that commonly occur to our Senses, how much more weak must it be,

2. In divine and spiritual matters? Here the Candle of our Reason must burn very dim, and stand in need of some brighter Light to illuminate and direct it. *The natural Man* (saith the Apostle) *discerns not the things of God, neither indeed can he, because they are spiritually discerned*, 1 Cor. 2. 14. How little does the Soul know of it self, of Angels and Spirits; and how much less of God himself! Can a Bucket comprehend the Ocean? or a Span

Span measure the Heavens? No more can our weak Reason fathom divine Mysteries. Does not the Splendor of some Objects dazzle and confound the Sight? Can our weak Eyes behold the Sun? How much less can our short Sight penetrate into the divine Nature, or a finite Understanding grasp Infinity? Does not every little Fly or Worm puzzle us, to find out the secret Springs of its Life and Motion? And can we hope thorowly to know Him, whose Nature and Ways are unsearchable and past finding out? Who can tell what kind of Knot it is that ties our Souls and Bodies together; or discover the secret Band that unites Time to Eternity? And shall we deny the ineffable Conjunction of two Natures in Christ, because we cannot untie all the Difficulties of that mysterious Union? In short,

This great Truth being revealed to us by Him who is Truth itself, we have all the Reason in the world to believe it, tho it be above the Ken and Comprehension of our shallow reasoning: and therefore it will become us to submit our Reason to Faith, not saying with *Nicodemus*, *how can these things be?* but with him in the Gospel, *I believe, Lord, help my Unbelief*. Thus we see the Offences taken against the Person of our Saviour, together with the Groundlessness and Invalidity of them. Those against his Doctrine are,

First, The pretended Novelty of it. When our Saviour preached his first famous Sermon on the Mount, wherein he vindicated the Law from the corrupt Glosses and Interpretations of the Scribes and Pharisees, and refined it into a more pure and perfect Rule of Life and Manners, we read that many were offended at it, and question'd among themselves, saying, *What new Doctrine is this?* Mark 1. 27. When St. Paul afterwards preached the same Doctrine, some said, *What will this Babler say?* and others, that he was a Setter forth of strange Gods, because he preached Jesus and the Resurrection, *Acts* 17. And the Christians that embraced it were stiled a new upstart Sect of the *Nazarenes*, who where every were spoken against, *Acts* 23. 22.

Antiquity adds Strength and Credit to any Doctrine, as having past the test and trial of many Ages: whereas Novelty and Innovation is a Blemish and Prejudice to any Opinion or Practice, as having no Vouchers beyond the present time, and is commonly the Product of fickle
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and new-fangled Brains. And therefore the Enemies of Christianity, to decry and put a stop to it, charged it with Novelty, saying upon all occasions, What new Doctrine is this? Now to remove this Offence, we may note that Christ's Doctrine was so far from being new, that it was from the beginning, and commenced immediately after the Fall of our first Parents. For the first Promise in Paradise of the Seed of the Woman's breaking the Serpent's Head, was the Dawning of the Gospel, or the Twilight of Christianity; which appeared a little brighter to *Abraham*, *Moses*, and the Prophets, who spoke of and believed in Christ; the Light of whose Prophecies shined more and more to the perfect Day of his Appearance, when this Sun of Righteousness arose with healing in his Wings, and enlightned the benighted World with the brighter Beams of his Doctrine and Miracles. The Covenant and Promises, with the Conditions annexed to them, were the same under the Law with those under the Gospel: *Abraham* and the Patriarchs were justified by Faith then as we are now, and we are said to be saved even as they; the only difference was, not in the matter of the Doctrine or Method of Salvation, but in the manner of revealing and dispensing of it. Our Father *Abraham* and others under the Old Testament believed in a Saviour to come, and that was counted to them for Righteousness; but we Christians under the New believe in one actually come: they relied on a promised Messiah, and we upon a God manifest in the Flesh: But the Person and Means by which they are saved, are in both the same; for they that are of Faith, (saith the Apostle) that is, true Believers as *Abraham* was, are blessed with faithful *Abraham*, Gal. 3. 9.

Again, The Doctrine of Christ was more obscurely reveal'd under the Law in dark Types and Shadows. There was a Veil over *Moses's* Face, and our Fathers were said to be all under a Cloud; they were left to gather spiritual Promises out of temporal, and could only see thro a Glass darkly into a mystical Sense of them: Whereas those things now are more clearly reveal'd, and Life and Immortality brought to light by the Gospel. The Veil is taken off of *Moses's* Face, and all the dark Types and Shadows of the Law are unriddled and dispersed by the Brightness of his coming; but still the Doctrine is the same in both, as it is one and the same Sun that sometimes
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peeps out faintly thro a Cloud, and at other times shines with a brighter Lustre : so that Christ's Doctrine was falsely accused of Novelty, which can shew the longest Prescription ; and no other can vye Antiquity with it, all Deviations from it being but so many Errors and Innovations super-induced upon it. And this may serve to remove,

Secondly, Another Offence agrinst Christ's Doctrine, and that is its seeming Opposition to the Law of *Moses*. This was often objected by the Scribes and Pharisees, who charged him with teaching things contrary to the Law ; and frequently upbraided him, saying, *Why do thy Disciples transgress the Traditions of the Elders?* Mat. 15. 2. The *Jews* had the Law of *Moses* and the Traditions of the Elders in very high esteem and veneration, making the Antiquity of their Traditions an Article of their Creed, and the Observation of them to be a perpetual and indispensable Obligation. So that when they saw Christ and his Disciples sometimes acting against the Letter of *Moses's* Law, as in the case of the Sabbath and eating the Shew-bread ; and at other times violating the Law of their Customs, as in eating with unwashen hands, and the like : when, I say, they saw him thus acting contrary to their Law and Traditions, and teaching Men so, they became impatient both of him and his Doctrine, rejecting him as a Blasphemer, and his Doctrine as an Imposture. But to remove this Stumbling-block, we must note, that *Moses's* Law was partly Moral and partly Ceremonial. As for the Moral part of it, consisting of the Decalogue or ten Commandments, he was so far from abolishing or contradicting it, that he declared, he came not to destroy the Law, but to fulfil and perfect it. Which he did by reinforcing and heightning the Obligation of it, confirming it with stronger Arguments, and encouraging it with better Promises, higher Motives, and greater Assistances.

But for the Ritual and Ceremonial Part of *Moses's* Law, consisting of Types and Shadows of good things to come, that was not properly destroyed or abrogated by him, but fell of it self, and ceased of course at the coming of Him in whom they were all compleated. For as Shadows vanish at the approach of the Sun, so did the shadowy Types and Ceremonies of the Law give place to the Substance, and disappeared at the coming or rising of this Sun of Righteousness. As for their Law of Customs and Traditions

tions of the Elders, our Saviour opposed and repealed them no further, than by rescuing them from Superstition, and taking off that vain Opinion of Holiness and Necessity, which the Scribes and Pharisees had added to them. He did not forbid them to wash their Hands before eating, nor require them to abstain from the innocent Customs and Ceremonies of that kind, but only willed them not to place any Sanctity or doctrinal Necessity in them, which he condemned, as teaching for Doctrine the Commandments of Men. So that the Opposition between Christ and *Moses* is only seeming, not real; for the Doctrine is the same in both, and differs not in Substance, but only in Shadows and Ceremonies, which make no material Alteration.

Thirdly, Another Offence against Christ's Doctrine is the seeming difficulty and opposition it hath to Flesh and Blood; its Principles (say some) are hard to be believed, and its Precepts harder to be practised. For they require some things against Nature, as to pluck out a right Eye, and to cut off a right Hand, and to deny our selves in the most natural and pleasing Inclinations, which are as dear to us as either; to forgive Injuries, to take up the Cross, to love Enemies, and the like, which are Burdens too heavy and grievous to be born: yea, its Precepts (say they) command some things contrary to the common Interest of Mankind, as to part with our Goods and follow Christ, to sell all that we have and give to the Poor, which would leave us destitute, and force us to turn Beggars our selves: nay, they require us not only to part with our Lusts, but on some Occasions our Lives too, which are hard sayings, who can bear them?

This is the great Stumbling-block of Libertines, Sensualists and voluptuous Persons, who are so fond of this World, as to prefer and persue the Trifles of Earth before the much better Treasure and more enduring Substance of Heaven. To remove which, I shall endeavour to demonstrate,

1st, That the Doctrine and Precepts of our Saviour are most agreeable to the best Reason and truest Interest of Mankind. And,

2dly, Compare it with all other Doctrines and Courses of Life that seem to rival and be set up against it: And then we shall plainly see this pretended Difficulty to vanish.

1. I say, the Precepts of Christ are highly consonant to Reason, and suited to the Sentiments of a rational Mind; for what can be more fit, than that we should love God above all things, who is our Maker and Preserver, and our Neighbour as our selves, which is the Sum of all Christ's Religion? And as these things are agreeable to Nature and Reason, so are they suited to our truest and best Interest; and tend more to the Ease and Happiness of Body and Soul, than any contrary Practices. To be humble, patient and contented with our condition, is far more easy than to be proud, peevish and impatient. To be overcome of evil, is mean and inglorious; but 'tis a noble Victory to overcome Evil with Good. Yea, the hardest Duties of Christianity, such as Mortification, Self-denial, and taking up the Cross, are attended with far more Peace and Comfort, than indulging the opposite Vices, and will in the end be recompensed with a much better Reward. But if we compare Christ's Religion with the *Mosaick* Dispensation, which was clogged with many burdensom Rites and Ceremonies, or with the Religion of the Heathen, which consisted in barbarous and bloody Sacrifices, or with the Service of Sin, which is attended with the basest and vilest Drudgeries, we shall see plainly Christ's Yoke to be easy, and his Burden not only light but delightsom.

Fourthly, The last Offence against Christ's Doctrine was its pretended Opposition to the secular Powers; this was objected to him both by *Jews* and *Romans*, who accused him, before *Pilate*, saying, *We find this Fellow perverting the Nation, and forbidding to give Tribute to Cesar, saying, that himself is a King*, crying out, *If thou let this Man go, thou art not Cesar's Friend; for whosoever maketh himself a King, speaketh against Cesar*, Luke 23. 2. John 19. 12. They charged our Saviour with a Design of dethroning *Cesar*, and setting up himself as a rival King to subvert and usurp his Kingdom. His Disciples too that came to him, were looked upon as Traitors joining in the same Design; and to be a Friend to our Saviour was to be an Enemy to *Cesar*. Hence they accused the Apostles as Persons, that would turn the World upside down, doing things contrary to the Decrees of *Cesar*, saying, *that there is another King, one Jesus*, Acts 17. 6, 7. Now to obviate this Objection, our Saviour denied not himself to be a King, for the Prophets in the Old Testament generally style the

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Messias, the King of *Israel*, and declare, that of *his Kingdom there should be no end*. However, this he tells them should be no Offence to *Cesar* or any earthly Princee, for *his Kingdom is not of this World*; if it were, he would have Legions of Men and Angels to scatter and confound all the Powers upon Earth. But that was none of his Business or Intent, he was no temporal King, to rule over Mens Bodies and Estates; but spiritual, to rule in their Hearts and Consciences, which no temporal Power can reach; he came not to shake the Crowns, or weaken the Power of Princes, but to subvert the Kingdom of Satan, and destroy the Works of the Devil, to subdue Sin and plant Grace in the Hearts of his Followers, to fit them for Glory, to vanquish the Powers of Death and Hell, and all our Ghostly Enemies, and to lead his Followers with triumph into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Neither did his Doctrine in the least diminish the Rights of Sovereignty. He owned himself to be a Subject of *Cesar*, and commanded all his Followers to render unto *Cesar the things that are Cesar's*, that is, Honour, Obedience and Tribute, which he himself punctually paid, and taught his Disciples to do the same. When Tribute was demanded of him, and he had not wherewithal to pay it, he wrought a Miracle for himself and *Peter*; so tender was he of offending the higher Powers. He acknowledg'd *Pilate's* Power to be given him from above, and submitted to it in the hardest Case; he forbade all manner of Resistance and Rebellion: and when *St. Peter* drew his Sword for that purpose, he check'd his Rashness, willing him to put up his Sword; for he that useth his Sword against lawful Authority should perish by it. By which we see the Falseness and Injustice of this Offence; our Saviour being rather a Friend than an Enemy to *Cesar*, and his Doctrine instead of shaking the Crowns of Princes, serves rather to fix and settle them the farther on their Heads. Moreover we learn hence, the true Sense of our Saviour's saying, *his Kingdom was not of this World*, whereby he disclaimed indeed all temporal Power in worldly Matters which he left to the Princes of the Earth, who exercised Dominion over them; but he denied not a spiritual Power in matters pertaining to the Kingdom of Heaven, which he exercised himself, and after gave to his Apostles and their Successors for the well-governing of his Church; of which some, by a mistaken Interpretation of these

these Words, have endeavoured to deprive both his Ministers and the Church. Thus we see the Offences taken against the Person and Doctrine of our Blessed Saviour, and likewise what little Ground or Reason there is for all or any of them.

But what is the Rise or Origin of these Offences from whence they come? Why, These proceed partly from the Policy and Subtlety of Satan, who to stop the Progress and Propagation of Christ's Kingdom, which he knows would be the downfall of his own, lays Stumbling-blocks in the way of his Followers, and fills their Minds with Prejudices against him and his Doctrine, blinding the Minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ should shine through them: and partly likewise from the Corruption and Deceitfulness of Mens Hearts, which are too apt to join issue with the Tempter, and to betray them into the hands of their Enemies, by an evil heart of Unbelief, in departing from the living God. But these Offences proceed chiefly from the Allurements of the World and an inordinate Love of the Profits, Pleasures and Preferments of this Life. This was the deplorable Folly and Misery of the *Jews*, who had so possessed their minds with expectations of worldly Greatness at the coming of the Messiah, that they despised the Meanness of our Saviour, and disdained him of whom they were disappointed of all their hopes. Had Christ, instead of healing the Diseases of the sick, cured the Distempers of their State, and restored again the Kingdom to *Israel*; had he instead of casting out Devils, cast out the *Romans*, whom they hated much more; and when he wrought a Miracle to pay tribute, had he wrought another to free them from paying any, he had then been a Saviour for their turn, he could then be no less than the promised Seed or long-expected Messiah, and would have received him with the greatest Joy and Veneration. But when instead of saving and delivering them, they found him a Fellow-Sufferer with them under the *Roman* Yoke, and seeing him lifted up on a Cross, when they looked for his Advancement to a Crown; they could not hear of him with any Patience, but instead of receiving him as a Saviour, they rejected him as a Malefactor.

This was the Sin and Folly of the *Jews* of old; and there are some still who, finding our Saviour using his Power,

Power, and directing his Precepts to the Purposes of another Life, when they are fond of the Pleasures and Preferments of this, are willing to part with him, and desire not the Knowledge of his Ways; like those who followed him for the Loaves, who when they fail'd, forsook and walked no more with him. These are the principal Grounds and Foundations of all the foremention'd Prejudices and Offences taken against him, which having no better Bottom, can stand them in no stead, but leave them for ever miserable. But before I conclude this Discourse, give me leave, tho I have already trespassed too much upon your Patience, to add a few things touching the Danger and Misery of those that fall into Infidelity and Irreligion by these Stumbling-blocks; and the Blessedness of all those that escape, and are not offended at them.

First, A Woe is denounced to the World because of Offences both given and taken; and tho Offences must and will come, yet woe be to them by whom the Offence cometh. It were better for them that a Mill-Stone were tied about their Neck, and they thrown into the midst of the Sea, than that they should sink and perish for ever in the Gulf of Perdition; for they that stumble and fall at this Stumbling-stone shall irrecoverably fall into the Pit of Destruction. For they lose all the Benefit of Christ's Merits and Satisfaction, and so must for ever suffer the Vengeance of divine Justice, which they can never satisfy: and that will doom them to Torments that are endless and remediless; *for how shall we escape (saith the Apostle) if we neglect so great Salvation? And,*

Secondly, As the Danger of falling by these Offences is great, so is the Blessedness unspeakable of those that escape and are not offended by them; for these are entitled to all the precious Promises of the Gospel, with all the Joys and Glories contained in them; and especially to an *Inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven for them*: where they shall be for ever happy in the Vision and Enjoyment of God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, and blest with the Society of Saints and Angels and the Spirits of just Men made perfect; and in a word, shall be made Partakers of things, *which Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, neither hath it enter'd into the Heart of man to conceive*: To which God of his infinite Mercy bring us by the Merits of Jesus Christ, &c.